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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes themes arising from a symposium on the future of developmental education in the United States. In recent years, public financial support of developmental education has been declining and is projected to decline further. Participants in a symposium on developmental education agreed on some trends that are emerging. Mainstreaming, the removal of developmental education from four-year institutions, and increased professionalism of developmental educators seem likely to continue. Increased professionalization in the ranks of developmental educators will be a helpful approach to combating the negative attitudes toward developmental education in the public, political, and academic arenas. (SLD)

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## Title Page

**Session Title: Symposium on the Future of Developmental Education**

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**Summary**

The participants in this symposium will offer their views and field questions on the future of developmental education. Issues that will be discussed include: trends and direction of developmental education in the 21st century; how these trends differ from current practice; the role of two- and four-year institutions in developmental education; and the role of the private sector in developmental education. Panelists are David R. Arendale, Interim Director, Center for Academic Development, University of Missouri-Kansas City; Richard Damashek (moderator), Director of Learning Assistance, Calumet College of St. Joseph; Kaylene Gebert, Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of North Alabama; Martha Maxwell, Founder of the Student Learning Center, U. C. Berkeley, Professor Emeritus; Santiago Silva, NADE Secretary and Director of Learning Assistance Center, University of Texas-Pan American; Diane Vukovich, Interim Director, Department of Developmental Programs, The University of Akron.

**Abstract**

The topic of this symposium is the future of developmental education: trends and direction of developmental education in the 21st century; how these trends differ from current practice; the role of two- and four-year institutions in developmental education; the role of the private sector in developmental education; and the role of the Internet in developmental education.

In the last 5 years, developmental education has attracted intense public scrutiny. This scrutiny has been manifested in Congressional and state legislative debates (Arendale 1998a, Zumeta 1998), on college campuses between faculty and administrators (Jones 1998; Guffey, Rampp &Masters 1998), and in college and university board rooms. Most of this discussion has been negative. Martha Maxwell (1997a) claims: "For over a hundred years, academics have considered our developmental courses as expendable and temporary. Since developmental education has become such a strong threat politically to those who would uphold academic standards, politicians and 4-year college leaders are trying to eliminate courses or at least to push them back to the 2-year colleges, as South Carolina and many other states are doing at the present." She argues further that "many universities no longer need to admit as many under prepared students as they did in the 80s and early 90s because there are larger numbers of well-prepared high school graduates to fill their freshmen classes" (p.1).

Despite a robust economy, public financial support of higher education has been declining and is projected to continue to decline (Arendale 1998b, Zumeta 1998). These financial concerns have had a direct impact on developmental education. As Zumeta (1998) notes, "states have also tried to reduce or cut remediation--campus-based pre-college courses for students deficient in basic academic skills" (p.83). As David Arendale (1998b) notes, "the U.S. press is filled with news reports detailing attempts and actions by postsecondary institutions and state and national policy makers to limit or eliminate learning assistance activities and developmental education courses, especially at the 4-year level"(p.1). The same concern is expressed in the Strategic Plan of the National

Association for Developmental Education. The plan projects that: "more states will legislate that developmental education courses in public 4-year institutions be decreased or eliminated" (p.3).

The decision to write this paper was based on the author's recognition that at the end of the twentieth century, developmental education was facing an uncertain future. The paper became a means of raising the issue with several of the most respected leaders in the profession: David Arendale, Director of the Center for Academic Development, University of Missouri, Kansas City; Hunter Boylan, Director, National Center for Developmental Education, Appalachian State University, NC; Kaylene Gebert, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, State System of Higher Education, PA; Diane Vukovich, Interim Director, Department of Developmental Programs University of Akron; Santiago Silva, Director, Learning Assistance Center, University of Texas-Pan American; Martha Maxwell, retired Professor Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley The issues we agreed to discuss were formulated in the following questions: 1. What trends, directions do you see in developmental education in the 21st century? 2. How are these 21st century trends different from developmental education services offered today? 3. What do you think about removing developmental education from 4-year colleges and universities? 4. Some people argue that community colleges are better suited to offer developmental education than 4-year institutions. What is your opinion? 5. If you had total control and unlimited resources, describe the components of your ideal academic support program.

From the responses to these questions, several trends emerged: 1) mainstreaming;

2) removal of developmental education from 4-year institutions; and 3) increased professionalism of developmental educators. When developmental education courses are "mainstreamed" as part of college-level, graduation credit programs of study a paradigm shift occurs from remedial education to academic support and enrichment for all students. Without question, the participants in the discussion were unanimous in proposing a comprehensive academic support program that would include elements such as a learning center, adjunct or paired courses, Supplemental Instruction, tutoring, student assessment and program evaluation. Boylan advocates funds for professional development and Gebert proposes faculty, student and staff recognition. Silva includes academic advising, counseling, career services, mentoring, and especially faculty training. Arendale and Vukovich propose a complete paradigm shift away from the medical model to learning support for all students. By deferring to Maxwell's latest book (1997b), *Improving student learning skills*, Vukovich gives Maxwell credit for providing insight into best practices based on years of experience and the best research. The result of Maxwell's study is the recommendation of a comprehensive learning assistance model. The value of such a model is that it is more easily integrated into the academic process because it is understood as a service for all students. It is not burdened by the stigma of serving only the least able students, who for many academic, administrative and political leaders are seen as a drag on the institution's academic standards.

To the extent that developmental education is under attack around the country, mainstreaming seems like an excellent strategy to circumvent its critics. If the trend to remove developmental education from 4-year and even 2-year institutions continues, then the academic needs of a large portion of the student body will not be met. According to

Tinto (1998), nearly four in ten students enter college with some form of developmental education need. In some institutions, developmental students make up most of the entering student body, requiring "remediation" in nearly every subject area. Currently, Tinto points out that nearly 90% of all colleges and universities offer developmental assistance, including the "elite" schools.

An approach to combating the negative attitudes in the public, in the political arena, and among our administrative and academic colleagues is the increased professionalization of our ranks. Although only a few graduate programs exist to provide advanced degrees for developmental professionals, developmental educators have many opportunities for professional development. The profession has experienced a proliferation of professional organisations on the national, regional and state level that hold meetings throughout the year to discuss issues of vital importance to professional educators. Further, the developmental educators' listserve, LRNASST, plays a vital role in providing a communications link between professionals no matter where they work. Members of the listserve discuss a wide range of subjects and provide each other with valuable information. Several important publications are available for the publication of information and analysis of issues important to professionals, and readership of these publications is growing. I think it is clear that the more informed as a profession we are the better able we are to direct our energies where they need to be namely in the service of our students.

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